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ABSTRACT

This publication presents five essays by teachers on accountability, particularly the descriptive review format for elementary and secondary education. Following a brief foreword, an opening essay, "Children's Values and Standards: Investigating Sources" (Cecelia Traugh), describes issues of teacher and student values and standards which lie at the center of the monograph. The following study, "When a Teacher's Values Clash with School Values: Documenting Children's Progress" (Lynne Yermanock Strieb), describes the conflict in values and standards between a teacher's methods of record keeping and her school district's required record book. Another essay, "Mary" (Cecelia Traugh), describes one student who is a thinker and learner, and how the standards she holds for her work and the conflicting standards that the school has for her constrict her educational experience. A different study, "Kenny" (Jane Andrias), describes the clash of values and standards between a boy and his high school where his ways of making sense of life and what he values are blocked by school standards and practices. The final piece, "The Descriptive Review of a Child: Teachers Learn about Values" (Rhonda Drucker Kanevsky), outlines the descriptive review process, format, values, standards, and assumptions; and discusses implications of this approach for assessment and evaluation. An appendix contains further information on descriptive review. Author information is included. (JB)

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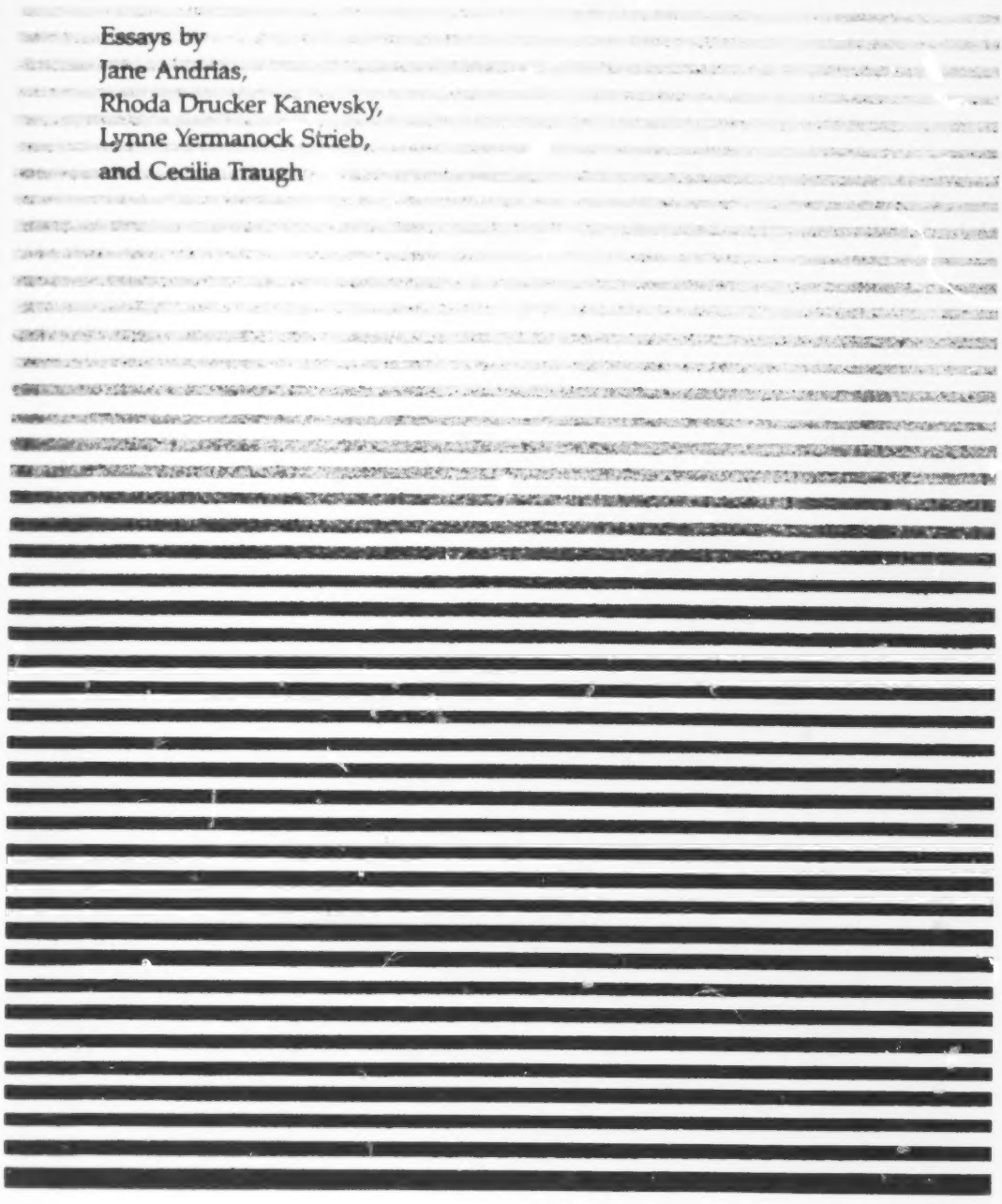
Exploring Values and Standards: Implications for Assessment

Essays by
Jane Andrias,
Rhoda Drucker Kanevsky,
Lynne Yermanock Strieb,
and Cecilia Traugh



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Exploring Values and Standards:

Implications for Assessment

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by
Jane Andrias
Rhoda Drucker Kanevsky
Lynne Yermanock Strieb
Cecelia Traugh

With a Foreword by
Linda Darling-Hammond

Edited by Alice Weaver

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Foreword

Linda Darling-Hammond

Much of the current rhetoric regarding school reform revolves around issues of accountability. "The public," we are frequently reminded, wants to know that schools are being held accountable for producing desired results. In recent years, this press for accountability has produced policies that offer more frequent testing, more carefully prescribed curriculum mandates, and more intrusive instructional monitoring procedures as means for achieving the elusive goals of accountable education. Yet, we have also learned that such policies often result in more standardized education, more attention to paperwork, and more focus on multiple-choice modes of teaching and learning than on intellectually challenging, individually responsive, and institutionally responsible practices in classrooms.

If traditional approaches to achieving external accountability can undermine the capacity of teachers to work effectively with students, what are the alternatives? These writings by a group of thoughtful practitioners provide a glimpse of some of the many possible answers. They refocus our attention on what might be termed internal or "student-centered" accountability -- the capacity of teachers to focus on learners' potentials, possibilities, and needs in a way that greatly expands the probabilities that individual children will be well served. This is the most important building block of professional accountability -- and one that can only be actualized in the complex, day-to-day practices of knowledgeable and committed educators.

The teachers provide detailed and vivid reports of their experiences with forms of inquiry revolving around close, sympathetic observation of children; guided reflection on the children's work, behaviors and relationships; and collegial discourse about the meanings of these things in the context of life in the classroom, school, family, and community. The practices they describe -- reflection, description of work, and Descriptive Review of a child -- are forms of assessment that exist to support teaching and learning, not to rank order individuals, allocate educational opportunities, or report numerical indicators to the local newspaper. Thus, they serve the accountability teachers feel to their students and their work rather than the accountability for standardized record-keeping often demanded by school bureaucracies.

These assessments are deliberately subjective, relying on viewpoints, relationships, and personal meanings obtained up close with an effort to understand rather than to merely record; yet they are not judgmental. They result in collaborative learning -- among teachers, between teachers and their students, and between teachers and parents -- without labelling. They acknowledge the importance of personal standards in guiding the efforts of human

beings -- children and adults -- and in constructing the meanings of what is both taught and learned. They provide occasions for teachers to construct meaning together, creating the shared norms and understandings that are the basis of professional practice.

These occasions for carefully observing children, for documenting aspects of their work, and for reflecting on classroom events and student responses, enable teachers not only to know their students well, but also to know their own teaching in a new way and to grow as a community of teachers engaged in sharing and developing knowledge. Thus, these approaches to assessment that combine a contemplative with a communal stance, constructing personal and collective understandings of learners and their work, support the learning of students, teachers, and school organizations simultaneously. In that way, these forms of assessment expand the capacity of schools to be responsible for and responsive to the students they serve. And that's what accountability must ultimately be about.

Children's Values and Standards:

Investigating Sources

Cecelia Traugh

The issue of standards lies at the heart of much, if not all, of the current discussion of schools, curriculum, assessment, and evaluation. A basic assumption is that only external standards can be public and shared. Society's standards become embodied in educational practices, such as standardized tests, textbook-based curricula and teaching, and definitions of cultural literacy. These standards turn into goals and objectives that drive day-to-day life in classrooms.

In this definition of what is important, there is little or no talk about standards people hold for themselves. There is no acknowledgment of the interior nature of the person, of standards whose sources are internal, or of the educational import of a person's own standards.

The existence of personal standards is not difficult to recognize. We know we have preferences for certain kinds of books and can describe what we think makes a good story. We all have our definition of a "job well done." Some of us are only satisfied when all loose ends are tied up; others care about the realization of an idea and don't worry about the details. Some of us put our efforts into the intellectual content of a project; others emphasize the aesthetic beauty. The children described later in this monograph have their own personal standards and will illustrate this point further.

What seems more difficult to recognize is that our personal standards play a vitally important role in shaping our education. Yet, if we can't imagine that standards other than those whose sources are external to the person can be part of what is educationally important, our imaginations will be blocked. We will not be able to imagine and value the ways children think about the world, the purposes they intend to enact, or the variety of ways they learn. We will not be able to imagine new roles for teachers or new structures for schools. We will not be able to gain new understandings of large educational purposes.

The weight placed on external standards has stopped us from opening up to children and from even asking what the child values. If the balance is to be redressed, we must begin to look at standards and values as children enact them for us.

Participants in Summer Institute II[1] have been working on this issue for the past two

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[1] Summer Institute II was held at Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont, for the first time in 1978. Participants were teachers and other professionals who had attended earlier institutes and were eager to continue exploring issues of teaching and learning from the unique perspective provided by Prospect. Over the years,

years. In particular, we have been exploring questions about the sources of standards, the standards and values children enact in their work, the conflicts and congruences of institutional (external) and personal (internal) standards, and the standards and values embedded in various evaluation systems. Our study is a drawing out of Pat Carini's extensive work on values.[2] We think our work is interesting both for what we have learned about standards and values and for what we have learned about our own process of inquiry.

A question that frequently comes up when discussing standards whose sources are interior to the person is: How can such private things be known in a public way? For this reason, we want to describe the modes of inquiry that Summer Institute II participants have used to pursue this question. If we assume that personal standards are totally private, unknowable, and relative, and that standards external to the person are the only ones available and knowable, we shape one kind of education. On the other hand, if we assume that children, and all of us, have values and standards arising from the person, enacted in the work we do, and knowable from that work, we shape a very different kind of education.

At the heart of our inquiry are the reflective processes: *reflection, description of work*, and *Descriptive Review of the child*.[3] (See the Appendix for fuller descriptions of these processes.) These processes are built around several basic principles. First, they are collaborative; they are done by a group, with each person speaking in turn. Each person's perspective is heard and becomes part of a summary pulling together the large themes and patterns of the group members' thinking. Private thoughts become public and shared; individual points of view are expanded and more fully developed. Second, the reflective processes are based on description as a way of knowing. Description allows us to have

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Institute II has taken on the character of an ongoing conversation about things that matter to its participants: children as thinkers and makers of knowledge; the value base from which teachers make choices and judgments; and assessment and evaluation in a diverse society. Four years ago, Institute II became a self-governing, collaborative study group.

[2] This work includes: "Honoring Diversity/Striving for Inclusion," ***Progressive Education for the 1990's: Transforming Practice***, Teachers College Press, 1991; ***On Value in Education***, City College Workshop Center, 1987; "Another Way of Looking: Views on Evaluation and Education," ***Education for Democracy: Proceedings from the Cambridge School Conference on Progressive Education***, October 1987.

[3] The reflective (documentary) processes developed out of the work at Prospect Center. Patricia Carini, the teachers in the Prospect School, and the participants in the early summer institutes were key in their development. The processes emerged from practice and have continually evolved with use in various settings and for various purposes.

> The Documentary Processes depend upon immersion in the focus of interest -- a child, a drawing, a setting; they make available a mode of inquiry with which one can describe and explore a complex human occasion, such as a child's expressiveness, without interference or manipulation. The child, or the event, is studied "as is," with respect for the integrity and privacy of the person. The view of the person on which the Documentary Processes rests assumes that learning occurs as the result of the human effort to create meaning and order out of the world of human experience.
> (***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes***, June 1986, pp. i and ii.)

imaginative insight into others. The intent is to discover in the child and her or his work the ways she or he has of making sense of things, the child's large interests, purposes, and preferred forms of expression. The intent is not to judge, explain, analyze, or categorize -- all of which rely on standards residing outside of the person and her or his work. Description depends on staying close to the person or the piece of work being described.

Several assumptions form the base for these modes of learning about children and their work. They include these points:

- People are expressive of meaning; they are not definable but are complex, ambiguous, and capable of change.
- Works, pieces of art or writing, are not merely products but are spaces for thinking. They, like their makers, are ambiguous and not definable. Works invite responses. Their meanings can change over time.
- Making things is a way of thinking and forming knowledge.

Another characteristic of our inquiry involves placing our questions in the context of larger ideas. These ideas keep our work connected to concepts of importance; they augment our work's meaning. Knowledge and meaning are examples of ideas we explored in Summer Institute II -- through reflections, descriptions of classroom practice, and autobiographical recollections. We thought about knowledge and meaning from many vantage points: what they are in our lives and experience; how they form and develop; how classrooms can be contexts for knowledge-building and meaning-making; how we can recognize that these large processes are occurring; and what evidence we can rely on for knowing they are happening. Through this work we have become more clearly committed to these processes as standards for our classrooms and teaching practice. These standards demand that we know children as thinkers and that we recognize and value their personal standards.

Third, our mode of inquiry uses the child study. Each study is different, depending on the particular child and the materials available. Child studies include a variety of reflective processes.

The materials drawn upon for the three studies in this monograph include drawings, writing, interviews of children and teachers, teachers' descriptive reports, and school reporting forms. Child studies can focus on specific questions. The questions we used to guide our studies were these:

- Where does the child make meaning?
- What values and standards are expressed in the child's work?
- How is the child's thinking and work documented or evaluated?

- What school standards is the child held to? How do the school's standards compare to those of the child?

These are a compilation of questions from two years of work. Each study is different in its emphasis on particular questions.

Finally, our inquiry uses teachers' descriptive or narrative reports and schools' reporting forms. The *description of work* was the format we used to examine reports and report forms. These questions were our guides:

- What standards are expressed by the form?
- What standards are expressed by the teacher's written text?
- What values about knowledge, meaning, and children are expressed?

We described reports and report forms separately from child studies with the intent of examining their values and content. And we incorporated descriptions of reports into our child studies to see, for example, how the school describes the child, what school standards are expressed, and if the school recognizes the child on his or her own terms.

With the use of this multilayered inquiry, we have come to understand more completely that personal standards can be known and made accessible. Our inquiry has also led us to understand the standards and values enacted in the various reporting and descriptive formats we have chosen to use. The studies in this monograph emphasize different aspects of our inquiry process and look at the issues of values and standards from a variety of vantage points.

The first study, **When a Teacher's Values Clash with School Values: Documenting Children's Progress**, has two interwoven layers. One layer is Lynne Strieb's description of the conflict in values and standards between her own methods of record keeping and classroom documentation and her school district's required record book. What can be learned about a child to support his or her education is the issue here.

A second layer is the description of the conflict between Lynne's personal values and the values held by her student, and Lynne's sense of uneasiness with the child's work. As she states, "If I had been able to go through my records during the last school year, I would have seen in them those clues to teaching her more effectively....But there was no time for such deep reflection because I'd had to keep up with the tasks surrounding the SPRB."

In the second study, I describe one child, **Mary**. The piece emphasizes Mary as a thinker and learner and the standards she holds for her work. Alongside the description of Mary, through her work, is a description of the school's reports and the standards the school holds for her. The question is a basic one -- how much room does Mary, and what she

considers to be important, have in her school? Overall, this is a story that does not describe a problem. Why bother with such a tale? As we seek to reimagine schools and the education they provide, positive examples can be as important as negative ones. Schools that attempt to gain access to the person and to provide authentic responses to that person are useful sources of knowledge.

A very different study is that of **Kenny**, a child who was part of *The New York State Study*.[4] Jane Andrias describes the real clashes of values and standards between Kenny and his high school. What we learn is how Kenny's ways of making sense of life and what he values in himself and others are blocked by school standards and practices. Here, the school makes little or no accommodation for the person.

In the final piece, **The Descriptive Review of a Child: Teachers Learn About Values**, Rhoda Kanevsky presents a study with several facets. One facet, the most basic one, outlines the Descriptive Review process. This explication lays out what the review process allows participants to learn about a child. A second facet explores the Descriptive Review format itself and the values, standards, and assumptions implicit within it. A third, but less explicit, element is the question: What are the implications of this way of reviewing children for assessment and evaluation?

This last question is, in fact, a key question throughout this collection of studies. Although each study addresses it from a slightly different perspective, each asserts that there are alternatives to the standardized ways into which we seem so locked.

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[4] ***The New York State Study*** (1990) is a follow-up to the in-depth study of the New York State pre-kindergarten program. The follow-up study was done in ten New York school districts and was designed and implemented by Pat Carini and Prospect Center. Funding came primarily from the Ford Foundation. The content of the study is based on extensive interviews of sixteen and seventeen year olds who, at age four, were enrolled in the publicly funded pre-kindergarten program and, for that reason, were participants in the earlier, state-mandated evaluation of the program (1975-80). Additionally, interviews of parents and teachers were conducted. The central question guiding this study was: How are these youngsters, who at age four were considered "at risk," presently negotiating their lives?

When A Teacher's Values Clash With School Values:

Documenting Children's Progress

Lynne Yermanock Strieb

The School District of Philadelphia, like systems all over the country, is rethinking assessment and evaluation practices. I want to add my voice -- a teacher's voice -- to this rethinking. I hope other teachers will join me. My story is personal and is difficult to tell because it is at once critical of some local practices, which themselves are being rethought, and is creative about what might be.[1]

My story reflects the tension between the kinds of assessment that grow from classroom practices and from teachers' own values and the requirements from outside the classroom: from school districts and from city, state, and federal governments, which are often concerned with accountability.

In telling this story, I am raising several questions: What is the relationship between accountability and assessment? For whom and for what purposes do teachers keep records? Does record keeping have to be standardized? Can alternative forms of record keeping exist in a large city school system? If so, what are the implications for teaching?

I will compare two kinds of records: the student progress record book (SPRB) and my own anecdotal records. I will compare the assumptions on which they are based and the values embedded in each of them. And I will tell you about one child, Tami, and what I learned about her from each of these records.

The student progress record book, nicknamed "Spare Ribs" by teachers, is the required form of record keeping for all teachers in the Priority One, schoolwide project schools in Philadelphia.[2] It is the way that children's progress is monitored; as I describe

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[1] The Assessment Task Force, sponsored by the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and the Office of Accountability and Assessment, is working on performance-based assessment. It comprises teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, parents, and members of the business community. The Office of Accountability and Assessment, in collaboration with teachers of reading and English and language arts supervisors, is rethinking the marking guidelines for these subjects in light of literature-based programs. The Chapter 1 Office is rethinking its marking guidelines, particularly for reading.

[2] Priority One grew out of a desegregation agreement in Philadelphia. The school district allotted extra money for additional resources and services to schools in which 75% of the children meet the poverty and test-score criteria for Chapter 1. Those schools are called Schoolwide Project schools. They receive both federal Chapter 1 funds and extra operating funds from the school district. Unlike ordinary Chapter 1 schools, in which money may be used to provide extra services to only Chapter 1 children, who are separated from other children, every child in Schoolwide Project schools is provided with extra services. Though every Schoolwide Project school receives funding for a program support teacher, a pupil support team, and staff development, these schools are given some independence in deciding how the rest of their money will be used. For example, the money could be used for three teachers or ten assistant teachers or to hire an additional reading or math

further, it is also a very effective way of monitoring teachers.[3] I was teaching in England when Priority One developed in Philadelphia, so, although I had always taught in Chapter 1 schools, this form of record keeping was new to me. The most important thing to understand, we teachers were told, was that extra money would be given to schoolwide project schools for three years in a row: 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91. If the schools showed progress in their Chapter 1 children at the end of the three years -- which was defined as a rise in standardized test scores, an increase in the numbers of As and Bs, a decrease in the numbers of Ds and Fs, and an increase in the number of children reading on grade level -- they were supposed to continue to get that extra money for the entire school.

The threat was, of course, that if there were not enough progress, those schools would get no more money after June 1991. This was a terrible threat, and some principals staked their reputations on the results. The SPRBs are used to report the information on which each teacher bases her or his report card grades, and reading and math levels -- all of which is reported to the state government, which filters the money to local school districts. (Other school districts and other state governments have their own ways of monitoring children's progress and holding schools accountable.) At the time I kept this record, however, I did not know to whom, beyond the principal, this SPRB information was reported.

What I was supposed to do in the student progress record book was so complicated that I find it difficult, even now, to describe. I was given a book filled with thousands of blank boxes, very much like a high school grade book, only a little bigger, in which I was to record my first grade students' grades. [See Figure 1.] I was supposed to devise a system for figuring out their grades, based on the school district's standardized curriculum and its marking guidelines. For each marking period, Priority One teachers were given a "curriculum web" and a "curriculum thread," which told us what we were supposed to be teaching and when we were supposed to be teaching it. Not only was I expected to correlate my grades with this curriculum, but I was also expected to correlate my lesson plans with it.[4] Principals were expected to examine these SPRBs and to give the teachers feedback on them.

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teacher. Most Chapter 1 schools in Philadelphia are Schoolwide Project schools.

[3] An undated memo from the associate superintendent (prior to 1990) implies that these SPRBs are not required, but when I taught in two schoolwide project schools, I was given no choice about keeping those records. Perhaps the choice of whether or not to require them belonged to the principal. That memo says, "Teachers are encouraged to keep journals or other informal records *that help in interpreting numerical reports.*" (Emphasis mine.)

[4] All teachers in the School District of Philadelphia have been expected to follow the school district standardized curriculum and to correlate their grades with it and the marking guidelines. Following the standardized curriculum is enforced, more or less, according to the principal and the school in which one teaches. As far as I know, teachers in non-Priority One, non-Schoolwide Project schools are given neither SPRBs nor curriculum threads and curriculum webs.

Figure 1

READING		TEACHER STRIEB								GRADE					ROOM 102					
CODE: E=Entry G=Goal		Level		8	4	4			4	4	5	5	3		GP3		GP2		GP2	
		Date		10/1	10/12	10/25	9/0	9/0	11/2	11/8	11/15	5/0	10/1		9/19		1/18		1/22	
		# Items		18	30	30	10/12	10/25	42		63		18				30		30	
	NAMES	E	G		p.34	p.44														
1	1	PP1	21	14/18																
2	2	R	21	3/18					44/42	100			17		30	100	27	90	27	90
3	3	PP1	21	18/18	30/30	30/30	100	100	41/42	97	62	99	100							
4	4	PP1	21	17/18					40/42	95	63	100	94							
5	5	R	21	6/18		27/30	87	90	42/42	100	63/63	100	34							
6	6	PP1	21	18/18					40/42	95	62/63	99	100							
7	7	R	21	3/18									17							
8	8	PP1	21	18/18	30/30	27/30	100	90	59/63	95	34/63	95	100							
9	9	R	21	4/18					40	95			22		29	97	26	88	30	100
10	10	R	21	13/18					26	62			72		28	93	30	100	29	97
11	11	PP1	21	17/18	29/30	29/30	97	97	60	90	60	97	94							
12	12	R	21	11/18		26/30		81	28/42	67	57	91	77							
13	13	PP1	21	18/18	29/30		97						100							
14	14	PP1	21	18/18		27/30		90	42/42	100	63	100	100							
15	15	PP1	21	18/18					39	93	60	97	100							
16	16	PP1	21	17/18	30/30	29/30	100	97	42/42	100	60	97	94							
17	17	PP1	21	17/18	28/30	28/30	93	90	41/42	97	63	100	94							
18	18	PP1	21	18/18	29/30	29/30	97	97	40/42	95	58/63	93	100							
19	19	PP1	21	18/18	30/30	28/30	100	93	40/42	95	60	94	100							
20	20	R	21	0/18									0							
21	21	R	21	4/18					41/42	97			22		30	100	26	87	29	97
22	22	PP1	21	10/18		29/30		97	38	90	61	98	56							
23	23	R	21	12/18					34/42	81			67		30	100	30	100	29	97
24	24	PP1	21	18/18	30/30	27/30	100	90	42/42	100	63	100	100							
25	25	PP1	21	18/18	29/30	27/30	97	90	40/42	98	61	98	100							
26	26	PP1	21	18/18	29/30	29/30	97	97	42/42	100	63	100	100							
27	27	R	21	13/18		30/30		100	34/42	81	47/63	74	72		30	100	29	97	27	90
28	28	PP1	21	18/18	29/30	26/30	97	81					100		29	97	27	90	29	97
29	29	R	21																	
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31	31	PP1	21																	
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33	33																			
34	34																			
35	35																			
36	36																			
37	37																			
38	38																			
	Mastered																			
	Passed																			
	Failed																			
	Total																			
	% Mastered																			

FIRST REPORT

SECOND REPORT

The feedback given by principals varied a great deal. Here are a few examples from interviews with teachers.

An experienced teacher who was hired to teach in Philadelphia in November 1989 and who almost left teaching after a few months told me:

> Every two months, the principal collected the pages for the subjects, one each week, until he'd seen them all. That meant I was constantly trying to keep track not only of the children's grades but also of individual sheets of paper. He'd just about finish when the cycle would start again. Sometimes the very page I needed to insert grades onto was on the back of the page that was with the principal.
>
> Math is my biggest pressure...Often I get contradicting messages. "You're not on strand," the principal says, and I say, "Right, that's because my kids are having trouble understanding this." And the principal says, "That doesn't matter, you have to stay up with the curriculum." Then, two minutes later in the conference he'll say, "You have five kids flunking math. What are you going to do about that?" And I say, "That's why I stay in the strand until the kids know it." And he says, "No, you have to move on with the curriculum." He doesn't give me things I should do to help the kids, but he makes me feel responsible...

In another school, the principal collected the SPRBs twice each report period and, if they weren't right, the teacher had to turn them in, corrected, on a designated date. A teacher of many years' experience told me this story:

> I remember the first time I got the record back, a checklist came with it. The checklist itemized each thing that was supposed to be included in the SPRB, including whether or not I had remembered to list my own name and, in the appropriate places, the children's names. If you did it right, you got a check for each item. If you didn't, it said, in bold handwriting, such things as "No grades," or "No marks or documentation," or "No entries for this subject," or "Please date entries of grades at the top of each column," or "We are one third through the second period. Remember, a minimum of three marks for each grade in the first year as per staff agreement. Please submit your grade book on 1/24. Please have at least one entry for each subject at that time." When you really got it right, you'd get a happy face or a certificate with a clown on it that said, "Many thanks for the excellent pupil progress record book. You make my job (and your job) so much easier."

In another school, the building committee has refused to allow the principal to use this SPRB to monitor teachers, while in yet another school, the principal never looks at it, delegating that job to the specialist teachers. In some cases, these teachers are not supervisory to the regular classroom teachers and should probably not be doing that work. Finally, in some schools the principal collects and signs the book, but does not follow up.

One might deduce -- as I did -- that the following values and assumptions are embedded in the SPRB, its purposes, and the ways in which teachers' documentation is monitored.[5]

Assumptions about Teachers

1. A record-keeping system must be given to teachers; they won't take the time to invent one, they won't be able to invent one, or the one they invent won't be useful.

2. There is no merit in teachers inventing their own system of record keeping.

3. Teachers have an inherent impulse to falsify; therefore, they need strict monitoring. Teachers cannot be trusted: they will cheat or are lazy or won't monitor children. This record will keep teachers honest.

4. The student progress record book will also keep teachers honest about grades because it will provide evidence to support those grades.

5. Keeping this record is easy, and teachers will find it to be so; because this is the only required record, observing, thinking, and writing about children have no place in monitoring their progress.

6. Using the SPRB will free the teacher because the record book spells everything out.

7. It will make the teacher better able to serve children.

8. Teachers can be forced to do anything through coercion and praise.

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[5] Patricia Carini, Alice Seletsky, and Penny Colgan-Davis collaborated with me on discovering the values and assumptions embedded in this book. Penny Colgan-Davis worked with me on my own daily record sheet. This work was done in the summers of 1989 and 1990.

Assumptions about Children

1. It is okay to reduce a child's performance to numbers.

2. You can learn about children with an accumulation of numbers and letter grades. More numbers, tests, and letter grades are better than less.

3. The repetition of tests, grades, and numbers forces the teacher to focus on the individual child.

4. Standardization is good for teachers and children.

5. Young children are like high school students and can be graded like them.

6. The way to support a child's learning is to look at this record; tests and grades will improve a child's performance.

7. Teaching the curriculum will make the underachieving kids improve academically. A school district's standardized curriculum is the only one worth teaching.

Assumptions about Subjectivity and Objectivity

1. The SPRB is objective: One principal said, "If you can observe the work children do, you can measure it. If you can measure it, it is objective."

Assumptions about Test Scores

1. Test scores will rise as a result of monitoring.

2. Test scores show what kids know.

Assumptions about Accountability

1. This record proves we teachers have done our job and the school has done its job.

2. This record will help in reporting to parents.

3. In completing this record, we are monitoring children, and there is only one right way to do this.

4. Accountability and assessment are the same thing.

What Is Valued

1. Numbers.

2. Tests.

3. Lots of numerical information.

4. One way.

A child learning to read gets lost in all of this. A teacher trying to teach gets lost in all of this, too. And remember, this record is used to monitor the progress of the children of parents who are poor and, in many cases, powerless; for the most part, this record is not used in schools that are not part of Priority One schoolwide projects.

* * *

I've always been a record keeper. I've kept records for two reasons. First, it's important for me to remember what the children do and how they do it and to remember what I do. Second, I have taught, and still teach, quite differently from most other public school teachers, because choice is an important part of my teaching. The children may choose from a variety of materials, including blocks and all sorts of art materials. I have also taught reading and writing differently from other teachers, in a way that is much more acceptable now. I felt from the beginning that I needed to document for parents (and for myself) what the children were doing in school -- to prove to them that I was teaching and that their children were learning.

So I keep several kinds of records, which have suited me over the years. Lots of what the children do is in my journal, especially in relation to what I've taught and thought about. I have kept daily records about children on a special form a friend helped me develop in 1973. [See Figure 2.] This includes notations made over the course of two two-week periods. I don't note every subject every day -- that wouldn't be possible -- and sometimes I miss a day altogether. I write in phrases rather than complete sentences. The record serves to jog my memory. Every two weeks, for three children each night, I write a narrative version of these records which I call my anecdotal record. These anecdotals are fuller descriptions of what the child did and, sometimes, my reaction to it -- how I felt about the child's activities and what I might try to do next with that particular child.

Terri Morse (CHILD'S NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED) FROM Th 10/5/89 TO Wed 10/18/89

NAME

DAY	READING	WRITING	MATH	PROJECT TIME / CHOICE	BEHAVIOR / SOCIAL
10/4-5	cap. per	"snake pooped"	11, 12	pumpkin - legs - showed kids how to make legs	helper
10/6		forgets what to do		pumpk - helped others	got in line. didn't put coat on table
10/10	alph. trble			pic + pump - very self motivated - seeks me out	again - not hearing get ears checked
10/11	read fr. board	to witch - "What do you do?"	measure	pumpk - finished	
10/12	Test "g" ending	Halloween - drew trees + clouds first	test	col blks	
10/14	PP - to me OK	Hall. words	Level test	lego	didn't follow rdg dir w finger
10/17	Big - little Better		clock	unifix - used all typical	showed Joanie her writing book
10/18	abc order	always draws first	clock	25 board make bk 1 pg	
				FROM Th 10/19/89	TO Wed 11/1/89
10/19	rain poem	where is her rain pic? Didn't listen to dir.	clock ↔	25 bd	
10/20	"The Park". doesn't know word	snake - detail copy upside-down	coins	make bk	
10/23	needs help w snake beg rhyming words	wants bk doesn't sustain	clock	masks	
10/24		hide + seek story		mask/bk	
10/25	watch play - shld have heard her		measure loop		trble follows dir for mask
10/26	list - trble keeping up	cont			
10/27		cont	addition	100 bd - didn't finish	
10/30	alph order	want to type Hide+ seek story	dig. clock	mask - didn't finish bk	didn't find list of names "you mean we're apples?"
10/31		"I like Nov. It is fun."			still trble listing
11/1	no att - trble				so worried abt coat was in closet

Figure 2

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I also keep a very simple reading record, with which I'm not yet satisfied. Every time I hear a child read, I note what he or she is reading, what that particular child's strategies are, what questions I asked, any special problems or strengths the child has, and what reading skills we worked on together.

Finally, and most important, I save the children's work, especially the work they generate themselves, like drawing and writing.

This kind of record keeping is not for everyone, but I have the time to do it, and it is important to me.

Assumptions Implicit in These Records

1. The child is whole and brings something to the act of learning.

2. Children's choices are important, including choices of books; such choices tell us something about what a child values.

3. Children's behavior and the choices children make are equal in importance to academic learning because they are given equal space on the record.

4. A teacher can observe children and record those observations.

5. A teacher can invent her own forms and ways of using records.

6. Record keeping is a daily process and, over time, even through brief notations, it will yield much information about the child.

7. The teacher has some responsibility and willingness to allow time to do these kinds of records.

8. Rewriting the data in another form is worth the time spent.

9. Some added focus should be given to reading, writing, and math; thus, space is made specifically for these subjects.

10. Most of what a teacher needs to know about the child in school can be included in this form.

11. A teacher's values will be stated, implicitly and explicitly, in all of her practice, including her own records.

What Is Valued

1. The work of children -- what they do, their choices and preferences, their values, their activity in the classroom.

2. The individual child.

3. A teacher's observations.

4. A child's behavior and social interactions as well as his or her academic work.

* * *

During the summer of 1990, at Summer Institute II in Bennington, Vermont, seven of us, from Chicago, Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Vermont, examined my anecdotal records, the entries from my journal, and the drawing and writing of one child -- Tami Morse.[6] We described the things Tami valued, what I valued, what the school valued, and where Tami's values were in conflict, or in harmony, with mine or with the school's. I found that engaging in this process of discovery with the other members of the group was quite difficult for me. As we worked together to disclose and sort out these different values held by the school, Tami, and myself, I often felt "exposed" and embarrassed. Our values are there, even when we think we are being "objective." In these group discussions, I learned about values that I wasn't conscious I had and about values I had that were hard for me to share. And, sometimes, I learned that I was doing exactly as I hoped.

I chose Tami because I was concerned about her not paying attention, her distractibility, her apparent inability to finish assigned work, and her lack of progress in reading. She seemed not to care about making sense of the reading, and she wouldn't stick with it. She valued social interactions but seemed not to hear, understand, or respond to me or to the work I asked her to do. Tami valued possessions -- too much, I thought, for a six year old. She talked about her clothes, often showing them off or bragging about their cost. She played with pins, buttons, barrettes, and her pocketbook, which further distracted her from doing classwork. I value paying attention and completing tasks, whether assigned by the teacher or chosen by the child. I value independence, listening, and, for children, not paying too much attention to clothes and other material possessions. In short, our values sometimes clashed.

During the summer, we first described one of Tami's drawings, and, then, her

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[6] The following people participated in the three-day discussion of Tami, whose real name has been changed here: Ellen Schwartz (chairperson), Penny Colgan-Davis, Diana Doyle, Melissa Lovelle, Judy Feldsten, and Lynne Strieb.

activities, interests, and values as seen in my anecdotal records. In Tami's drawing [Figure 3], we saw many people, lots of motion, a certain mathematical quality, and a stage-like composition. From the anecdotal record, we saw that in her much valued social relationships, Tami was a leader. With her clear knowledge of what she wanted to do -- read with someone, build a castle out of paper, or write a story with another child -- Tami could engage children in her activities. And, in return, they directed her toward her own work and toward learning. Rather than distracting her from her work, the children helped her to concentrate. Tami showed herself to value performing in a variety of ways. She did a mime of ***The Three Bears***, maintaining the point of view of Goldilocks throughout. She eagerly memorized songs and recited poems with confidence. She dramatically did the exercises in gym as if she were performing on stage. And she often volunteered to be first to lead games such as Punchinello. Tami's clothes sometimes became costumes and props. She was sensitive to her audience, never distracted from her roles, and always self-assured. Tami was observant of natural phenomena, and she contributed thoughtful comments and questions in class discussions. She returned often to her science journal to write about the silkworms and our pet snake. She thought about the things we talked about in class and conversed with me about them. Upon looking more closely at the records, at the work she finished, and the work she was distracted from doing, it became clear to me that Tami completed only those activities that made sense to her. When something did not make sense, like the reading workbook, for example, she avoided it and did something else. (And, in this area, her values clashed with mine, because I value sticking with something until it makes sense.) After close examination, Tami turned out to be a very focused child.

If I had been able to go through my records during the school year, I would have seen in them more clues to teaching Tami more effectively. I would have searched for those things that made sense to her. After we finished noting her interests, the group at Summer Institute II gave their recommendations, based on Tami's strengths and values: storytelling, acting out stories, using puppets, reciting, drawing first and then writing. I could have used her interest in conversation, and I could have noted which activities made sense to her and used more of them.

But there was no time for such deep reflection because I'd had to keep up with the tasks surrounding the SPRB. I spent many hours trying to make sense of that record. (No one wants to do work that makes no sense.) I got so caught up with the SPRB that I began to think of putting it on the computer so I could do it more quickly and efficiently. I learned to make up tests to give to first graders and to get lots of grades for relatively unimportant things like spelling and handwriting. I never could get the reading portion of the SPRB straight, perhaps because it was senseless to me.

And after all that work, all those late nights, with all the tears, the record told me nothing, referred to nothing, meant nothing. When I looked back at some of the entries in the SPRB to see if I could learn anything about Tami and her reading, this is what I found: on February 15, for example, Tami took the Level 7 book test. She got 72 right, or 98%. A young child learning to read got lost in this record. The SPRB is supposed to monitor

Figure 3

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progress -- to prove that the children are learning and the teachers are teaching. But this record told me nothing. It had nothing to do with any of the things I valued in teaching or in children. I was told again and again by principals and supervisors, "No matter how we evaluate children, we all want the same things for them." But I'm not so sure about that.

The only thing that allowed me to maintain a thread of dignity, in the twentieth year of a successful teaching career, was to focus on the children by keeping my own anecdotal records with a vengeance. And if you tell me that most teachers won't keep such records, I must first ask you, "When have we been trained to do them?" And then I will say, "Surely somewhere between my own anecdotal records and the student progress record books there are some possibilities?"

My anecdotal records refer directly to my teaching; they grow directly from my teaching and return to it. These records describe the child in specific terms, in all of her complexity and richness. They describe what the child *can do*; they provide clues that help me to teach and to make materials and activities available that will engage and support her values and interests.

* * *

Update

This paper was written during the summer and fall of 1990 and is about the 1989-1990 academic year. In October 1991, at a meeting of representatives from Priority One schools and schools with a written commitment to developing school-based management, the superintendent of schools urged these groups to develop new ways of assessing and reporting student progress. Teachers were very interested in participating in this work. Teams from 87 elementary and middle schools and 12 high schools applied to become the first schools to pilot alternative forms of assessment and to receive funding for their effort. Thirty-seven were selected and began to carry out their projects in January 1992.

This is a time of transition, with Priority One schools continuing to use the SPRB. Teachers and administrators are asking these questions:

- Which forms of assessment and evaluation will be retained from the past?
- In which ways should the school district report to the state and federal governments?
- What are the relationships between assessment, curriculum, and teaching?
- Which ways of assessing children will be most beneficial to students, parents, and teachers?

Mary

Cecelia Traugh

Mary had just completed fifth grade when we described her work and thinking. She came to my attention as an interesting subject when her teacher told me this story about her.

> Mary had completed a large project on the Parthenon and was visibly proud of her work. Much time and energy had been invested in this project. When she received the teacher's comments about the project, she read them and put them aside. The comments were positive overall, but included some suggestions for next time. When the time came for her to take her project home, she wasn't interested in it. Her teacher was quite disappointed, believing his comments and evaluation had been far enough off the mark to result in discouragement.

What had Mary valued in the project? What standards had she held for it? Could there have been a response to her that would have been more supportive?

The group studying Mary included Summer Institute II participants John Colgan-Davis, Buck Cramer, Bruce Turnquist, Gina Richter, and myself. We described several kinds of work Mary had done -- a range of drawings, stories, and sections of the project that brought her to our attention in the first place. We also described her descriptive/narrative reports from second, fourth, and fifth grades. What follows is the Mary we came to know.

Mary's work reflected a powerful aesthetic interest in pattern and structure and a corresponding ability to use patterns and structures in many ways. In her geometric designs, she used repeated shapes with variation to create beautiful patterns, matching patterns of harmonious colors to the patterns of shapes. The designs were intricate and carefully drawn and colored. She also worked often with pattern blocks in a similar way.

Her success with and enjoyment of mathematics were linked to her ability to see and make use of patterns and to use patterns she had seen before to figure out new patterns. This had been a strength for her and had also shown up clearly in her fondness for problem-solving activities.

In a related math activity -- building a device to measure time -- Mary and her partner built a pendulum-like device (a rubber golf ball on a string) and used its repeated bounces against a wall to measure time. Both the nature of the device and Mary's understanding of how the variations of the bounces affected the device's ability to accurately measure time, reflected her deep acquaintance with repeated patterns and their variations.

Her stories also used pattern and structure in several ways. One way was drawing on a variety of story sources as patterns in her writing, molding diverse elements to her own purposes. Another way was in the unfolding of a story itself -- for instance, using sections of dialogue alternating with sections of narrative in order to introduce the characters, explain the background, and set the plot in motion in a smooth way.

Other aspects of this aesthetic appreciation of structure and pattern included a liking for things to fit together -- details fitting smoothly into the whole of a story, parts of a geometric pattern fitting together harmoniously, the different aspects of a search project fitting together and adding to each other. This gave Mary an ability to understand details in relation to large ideas and vice versa. It was part of her desire to really understand ideas and to make sense of things. It was also part of her orderliness and her use of good forms -- as in the technical details of her writing and the general care with which she did her work.

All of this made Mary a complex thinker, one who both handled and saw several layers or strands of a story at once. Her stories had large meanings as well as clear plots and interesting relationships between characters. She could grasp a number of related mathematical ideas at the same time. The complexities of myths or stories were accessible to her. Her work often had a complex, layered aspect, with several threads woven together.

Another aspect of Mary's thinking was the power of her imagination, which expressed itself in various ways. One of them was in fantasy, an important part of her stories. She could create a new world, people it with characters, and relate it to our world, as in her ***Adventures of the Little Merpeople.*** [The entire text follows this article.] She drew on the fantasy worlds of myth, fairy tale, and movies as sources for her work. She was sensitive to the power of an image -- the idea of ruins or Persephone's moment of terror as she falls into Hades.

Another area of imagination was her creation of humor and word play -- "Merpeople 'R' Us," "Cramcrawler" (as a kind of transportation), and the clever repartee of the dialogue were some examples from this story in which "Merpeople" in the Atlantic told stories about what a "bad neighborhood" the Pacific Ocean was. Plots were often given a humorous or ironic twist, as in a story about a kidnap victim who enjoyed being kidnapped, and seemingly incongruous elements were placed together and made to work.

This ability to play with ideas made it possible for Mary to experiment in a variety of ways and to speculate easily. In making electrical circuits, in building constructions like the time device, in forming geometric designs, and in her writing, Mary tried out lots of ideas until she found some that satisfied her. Sometimes, as in writing, there were dry spells until a new conception that satisfied took hold. This meant false starts were sometimes a part of the way she worked. It also meant complexity and depth in her final projects. In discussion, Mary could entertain various possibilities and consider them all before making her decisions. She could be flexible in her thoughts. She could speculate.

Mary saw connections between ideas and experiences and between ideas and other ideas. Seeing those connections contributed to her understanding, adding depth and meaning. The connections Mary made tied together her school and home life in positive ways, enlarging her thought in school. These connections broadened the sources of her imagination, made it more powerful, and gave her a wide base for problem solving.

While Mary could be playful, both intellectually and socially, she desired something worthwhile from her work. Work and learning went together in her mind, however lightheartedly she may have worked, and some kind of meaning and worth were vital aspects of her learning. She approached her work seriously, entered projects with great energy, and took care in doing them.

Mary valued competence, seeking to do things right and to meet her own high standards. Sometimes she could frustrate herself if she couldn't reach her standards of meaning, worth, or competence. She also valued independence and self-reliance. Her competence helped give Mary the ability to work on her own and to maintain ownership of her work. Mary worked readily and happily and much of the time in conjunction with friends. She was able to work collaboratively on projects; help from adults, however, which took too much control of her work away from Mary, was not welcome.

Human relationships were a strength for Mary. She had close friends. She navigated her way through conflicts well, knowing when to stand up for herself and when to compromise in difficult situations. Human relationships and ideas of family were also important themes in her writing.

Mary was a person of firm opinions who could speak out forcefully. This speaking out accounted for part of the liveliness and energy she brought to her work and thought. In her writing, it led to fully articulated and supported positions and arguments. It was connected with her active stance, her persistence, and her ability to navigate her life so successfully. It showed itself in her directness and her honesty in person and in writing, a reflection and source of her strong voice.

Overall, we found much congruence between Mary as a thinker and the values of the school. The Middle School took an expansive stance toward subject matter, allowing students many entry points. A large aim was to provide the opportunities for all kinds of thinking. Math, for example, was play, patterns, making, speculating. This approach suited Mary well, as it gave her room to do and to be. The large place given to writing, the opportunities the curriculum provided for complex thinking, the value given to friendships and relationships, to feeling and meaning as well as to intellect, served Mary well in school.

Where there was a school expectation of consistency, of rote and routine, divorced from personal interest, school "rubbed" Mary the wrong way. Completeness and tidying up loose ends were not always values she held.

Remember the project that had pointed us to Mary in the first place? There turned out to be a very interesting nexus of values here. The school's standard for selecting topics for this project was some degree of real personal interest in the topic, passion even. In Mary's description of how she selected her topic, she said her first and real interest was in "ruins." Here is a large topic with much aesthetic and romantic power. Within the context of our projects, "ruins" would have been a perfectly fine topic. As it developed, however, Mary brought her idea home, and her parents advised her strongly against this topic: What would be its point? Where would she find material?

Her parents voiced the standards of the traditional school project. The topic was reduced to "The Parthenon," something Mary had little real interest in. What we saw Mary do in her project, however, was to shift her purpose -- the standard shifted from interest, or love of the topic, to doing everything with no help. Her pride had its center in her knowing that the project was truly hers.

For Mary's teachers there are levels of purpose for doing this or any review of a child's work. There is the particular purpose of knowing a child and finding more ways to support her strengths and interests and the achievement of her own standards. There is also the purpose of reflecting on program. To be educative, a program must be "roomy." The many facets of this "roominess" are suggested by the following questions which are among those we keep before us:

- Where in the program can the voice of the student be expressed?
- Where can a child make real choices about the substance and form of her work?
- How accommodating are we of the physical and intellectual styles of students?
- Where can a child's own educational purposes be enacted?
- Where can a child be the active creator of knowledge?

The Adventures of the Little Merpeople

"Father, Supher, Sam, and me are going for a look around our new sea," Susan said.
"Okay, but don't get lost," father replied.
"We won't."

* * *

Hi, I'm Sam and I'm a Mermaid. I'm 23,430 years old, which is eleven in your way of counting. We just moved from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, today, so me and my brother and sister are going for a look around. I'm kind of scared because my friends back in the Atlantic told scary stories about the Pacific. I'm upset because I had to move away from my friends and my boyfriend and everything back home.

"Sam, stop daydreaming," Susan said.
"Where are we going?" Sam asked.
"Well, if you weren't so busy in your daze, you would have known that we are going to Merpeople 'R' Us for grandma's birthday present," Susan replied.
"Okay."
"Since we don't have a Cramcrawler [Merpeople's transportation], father called for some seahorses."
"When we get there, you two [pointing to Susan and me] can look around all you want," father said.

Whenever we do things together, Susan and I are put together and Supher goes with my dad. Supher never says a word so that's why he goes with my dad. My mom got killed by the sea witch named Titanus. My mom went to vist her sister in the Pacific by herself. A sea horse offered her a ride and she accepted. What she didn't know was that the sea horse was really Titanus in disguise. Titanus took my mom to her palace. My mom didn't know her way around so she thought she was going to her sister's house.

All of a sudden I looked around. Where was everyone? Where was I?
"Heh, heh, heh, I've got you now," the sea horse said.
"Who said that?"
"Who do you think? You are just as stupid as your mother."
"Oh, no," I said. I tried to get off of her but I was stuck.
"TITANUS, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO ME?"
"Heh, heh, heh."
"Will you stop it with the heh, heh, hehs already?"
"Do you think I care?"
"Weeelll."
"You never answered my question," I said.
"What question?"

"What are you going to do to me, remember?"
"Oh, yea. Heh, heh, hey, ummm, I forget."
"Then, can I go?"
"Oh, we're here," Titanus said.
"Here, where?"
"My palace, of course."
"You call *this* a palace?"
"Oh shut up, girl."

The sea horse turned back into Titanus, which means that I got thrown off.
"Well, what are you going to do to me?"
"I'm just going to make myself happy."
"Well, what about me?" I asked.
"What about you?"
"What about making *me* happy?" I asked.
"What about making you happy?"
"Oh, lord."

We walked into the so-called "Palace." There were Horchitals all over the place. Horchitals have the face of a Merperson and a creature-like body. One of the stories back in the Atlantic was when Titanus catches someone she turns them into a Horchital. I never believed them, but now I see that it's true.

While Titanus had her back turned, I tried to run out, but a flying monkey caught me and brought me back to Titanus. She didn't care that I tried to escape.
"Mom, mom," I shouted.
"Oh, Sam," my mom called back.
She was still a mermaid, thank goodness.
"Mom, how come you're still a mermaid?" I asked.
"A wise merman once told me that I have a special power, and if I ever got caught by Titanus, I would not turn into a Horchital, but I would be kept here, until my eldest daughter came. Then Titanus would disappear and everything would be back to normal."

I looked at Titanus and sure enough slowly she was disappearing and the Horchitals were turning back into Merpeople. I gave my mom a great big hug.
"Oh look, there's father, Supher, and Susan!"

And they lived happily ever after.

Kenny

Jane Andrias

Kenny was a student in the original ***New York State Study***. When the study was resumed in 1988, Kenny had dropped out of high school. During his school career in upstate New York, Kenny had been retained twice, once in third grade and once in seventh grade. He was skipped from seventh to ninth grade. He left high school while attending a work/study program within his school district. He was located in 1988 for a taped interview.

When Kenny was an elementary school student, his teachers expressed concern about his language development and his reading. He was placed in a special reading program and began to receive extensive testing. Based on the results of his tests and an attempt at a collaborative Descriptive Review by the staff at his school, there was speculation that he might be emotionally disturbed.

A small group at Prospect Summer Institute II, including Betsy Wice, Rhoda Kanevsky, Jean Stevenson, Elizabeth Heaton, Pat Carini, and myself, looked at a body of Kenny's artwork from elementary school and at the Descriptive Review done by the staff. The taped 1988 interview from ***The New York State Study***, and its transcript, however, became the center of interest. What compelled us was the power of the voice that came through as we listened to Kenny's tape and as we read the transcript.

The impact of Kenny's voice and the cadence of his phrasing dictated to us the manner in which we would present what we had learned about him. The memory of his voice resonated as we described two selections from the tape and two pieces of artwork he had done in elementary school. We constructed our presentation as a kind of dramatic reading, using as many of Kenny's words as possible to punctuate what knowledge we had gained about him and his school. One of us narrated, and one of us read Kenny's words.

We had five goals:

1. Look for themes that seem to connect the material in order to develop a picture of Kenny and his values.

2. Look for the school's values.

3. Compare and contrast these values in order to draw conclusions about the problems that arise when a conflict exists between a student's values and a school's values.

4. Help the student to see himself as a learner and to understand and realize his options in his education and his life.

5. Find a meaningful and productive way to present the findings of our study to the New York State Department of Education.

Kenny was a mapmaker, a cartoonist, a diagrammer. We saw in his work and his words that he was interested in making paths and connections, defining borders, and finding a design that worked. He looked at the whole and its parts in order to gain a perspective from several vantage points. He respected clarity, order, and a plan or a scheme. He tried to understand the way his school functioned. These were his words about his high school's treatment of a student's lateness:

> It's just terrible. Going to the office to get, you know, send you down to get a late pass. Send you down, you're up on the third floor, you gotta go all the way down -- you can't get by the hall monitors either. You gotta get by and tell them you're going to the office. They want to know if you've got a pass -- no, I'm going to the office to get it. You finally get down there and there's probably fifteen people in line, you gotta wait in line. There's fifteen people and they are late for classes, too.

Kenny was a hands-on worker. He valued "knowing something." He learned through doing. He attributed knowing to remembering, and he achieved this by immersing himself in his activities and practicing. He liked to find out how things worked. Kenny valued experience, not books. He valued caution, patience, and the "magical" quality of knowing how to do something well. He listed three types of teachers: the "trickster" who magically makes you learn without you realizing it; the "book teacher" who "hammers" it into your head (and "no good mechanic would ever take a hammer to a machine"); and the "hall monitor" who is just there to direct traffic.

Kenny was an observer who preferred distance. He valued thoroughness and carefulness. Each motion was important. He stopped time: his anecdotes and his cartoons captured moments in time with the use of words and lines.

Kenny valued friendships and belonging. Yet he was removed from his friends when he was retained in third grade, and, once again, when he was skipped from seventh to ninth grade. He talked about missing class events with his peers.

Kenny valued responsibility. He was proud that he didn't abandon projects. When he related the story of his motorcycle accident and his attempts to maintain control of the bike, he said, "I stayed with it. I didn't ditch." He respected the established order and his responsibility toward and within a system, whether it was a machine, a drawing, or a school. Kenny expected the responsibility to be reciprocal. Yet the school lost his mechanical drawings, which amounted to three months of work and had been on display. He received

an A in the course, but then had no work to show for it.

The school also misguided him about a sequence of courses he was supposed to take. He was then expected to repeat an entire year. Kenny said:

> I had three. I had enough for my sequence. He said, "Okay, you've got your sequence," and I'm like, "Good." I had math already done because I took the test, and I took a year of it. I only took two years of math for the requirement -- I just got the requirement, so I could graduate, and I did that. That was just. Then the new guidance counselor told me that the old guidance counselor was wrong, and I couldn't use it. He said I would have to start over and pick something else for three years of sequence, and I was, like, "No way." Then I started Afternoon School. They had me go five days, and they had me taking two classes in one day. I barely passed the year before -- there is no way I could have done it. I didn't want to stay there after that.

Kenny respected understatement and reserve. He was not aggressive and outspoken, but he did try to get answers. He told us of his attempts to get explanations for school problems. At the end of a school year, Kenny received a blank report card. His efforts to have the report card explained, in order to determine whether or not he had to attend summer school, were futile. In the fall he was told it was a computer error, and that he did, indeed, have to repeat some courses.

> **Kenny:** I didn't -- I started school again. Well see, I was going to go back and finish school, but this summer I didn't know if I'd passed or not. I didn't get a report card. I got it, but there were no grades on it. So I called the school, and I'm like, I wondered if I'd passed or not, because I was going to take, I planned on taking summer school, because I was pretty sure I passed social studies, and I wanted to graduate this year. So I wanted to find out if I'd failed or passed. I had this report card -- but no grades on it for the exams -- there were none.
>
> **Interviewer:** Who fills out the report cards? All the different teachers?
>
> **Kenny:** Yeah. There were no exam grades on it, but one. I can't remember what that was for, but I passed that. That was the one exam grade there. And there was no quarter grades and no final grades at all -- so I didn't know if I passed or not. So I called before summer school started to find out if I passed or not, and they said I couldn't find out until I talked to the teachers, and they're all gone for the summer, you know, so I couldn't find out until school started next year. I asked them how I was going to know what classes to take in summer school, and they're like, well, we don't know. It's like I'm not going to take a summer school class if I already passed it, and I couldn't find out. So I was hoping I passed.

Kenny ultimately dropped out of school. Now he works with automobile machinery. He will probably have more success with the machine than with the institution.

* * *

The school expects students to move through the system's sequences passively. These sequences are often poorly mapped and arbitrarily subject to change. If the student moves successfully, he graduates. If not, he is penalized by being retained, or he drops out. The student is not included in planning or discerning his or her options. "Who am I in this system?" "Where is my place?" "Who sees my viewpoint?" These questions are not considered.

The school values textbook-oriented teaching, perhaps of the "hammering" method! There is little experiential and practical work. Patience and time do not come into play. The strict prescription for education must be adhered to. There is no room for pacing and differentiation. Thoroughness, carefulness, and investigation are not as important as "getting through."

The school has the final word. There is no dialogue between the student and the school. There is little inclusion of the student in the mapping out of a course of study. The possibility for agreement and conciliation is remote. The student's responsibility is to read and to negotiate the system. The school's responsibility is to develop a (convoluted) hierarchical structure. The school is always right. If something goes wrong with a student, the school looks for pathology. It remediates. It gives up.

The school values conformity. This moved Kenny toward invisibility. The school claimed that it tried to help Kenny by sending him to a special work/study program, and Kenny failed. The school focused on what was wrong with the student rather than on what was right with him.

Issues Arising from This Study

1. What is the meaning of demanding responsibility from students in a school environment that is irresponsible and unresponsive?

2. What are the social implications of that responsibility?

3. When the emphasis in a school is on hierarchical structure and that structure appears to be arbitrary and confusing, the student's attention may be focused on deciphering that structure and negotiating his way through it, rather than on learning.

4. In the process of assessing a student, a school may use a student's

vulnerabilities and learning style to make him feel that he must protect himself. The school appropriates and interprets the student's own language and work as a way of seeing how the student makes sense of the world.

5. What is the nature of change needed in schools in order for students like Kenny to be able to learn and be successful?

The Descriptive Review of a Child:

Teachers Learn About Values

Rhoda Drucker Kanevsky

In September 1990, the School District of Philadelphia announced plans to discuss elementary school restructuring and alternative assessment. We decided to start our year in the Philadelphia Teachers Learning Cooperative (TLC) with a special series of discussions about the values and standards inherent in various assessment formats in order to be more effective in the district's discussions.[1] We hoped to clarify the values we hold and assumptions we make about what is important for children and what should be happening in classrooms. We decided to take a close look at the Descriptive Review of a child, one of the reflective processes developed by Patricia Carini and colleagues at Prospect Center. The TLC has been using these processes in our weekly meetings since 1978. We know they are alternatives for assessment and can be useful in discussions about school restructuring.[2]

We focused on the Descriptive Review of a child because it helped us discover what is important to a child, how a child thinks and learns, standards a child might hold for her work, and what can support the child's education.

> The primary purpose of the Descriptive Review of a Child is to bring together varied perspectives in a collaborative process, in order to describe a child's experience within the school setting. An underlying assumption of the Process is that each child is active in seeking to make sense of her or his experiences. By describing the child as fully and in as balanced a way as possible, we begin to gain access to the child's modes of thinking and learning and to see their world from their point of view: what catches their attention; what arouses their wonder and curiosity; what sustains their interest and purpose (***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes,*** June 1986).

Teachers in the TLC know how important the process is for learning about individualism as well as about children in general; but the group had never examined the format itself. We asked the following questions: What assumptions are implicit in the format? What is being valued? What are the implications for assessment and evaluation?

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[1] See The Philadelphia Teachers Exchange, "On Becoming Teacher Experts: Buying Time," ***Language Arts*** 61 (7): 731-736.

[2] Members of the group were: Judy Becker, Marta Bloy, Pat Boyle, Karen Bushnell, Patty Cruice, Lisa Hantman, Dimitrios Hilton, Rhoda Kanevsky, Joyce Kemmler, Helen Lamont, Connie Major, Marsha Matusow, MaryAnn McBride, Leslie McGoldrick, Nancy McGrath, Judy Mintier, Peg Perlmutter, Barbara Pressman, Joann Seaver, Lynne Strieb, Jan Swenson, Sherry Tatro, Barbara Tucker, Marcia Volpe, and Betsy Wice.

In this study, I will go through the Descriptive Review of a child as it occurs in TLC meetings. Alongside each descriptive heading, I will list some of the assumptions and values I have drawn from the group's description of the format during our meetings. I am including excerpts from a teacher's presentation and some of the participants' questions and recommendations to show how the process works. At the end of this examination, I will draw from a series of discussions in which we considered the larger implications of the Descriptive Review for teachers and schools.

* * *

A teacher in the Teachers Learning Cooperative requests the review during our planning meeting because she has questions about a particular child. The focusing question of the review depends on what the presenting teacher wants to learn. Here are some examples of focusing questions from the past few years: "How can I help Janean gain academic competence?" "How can I help Jason work more productively with other children in the classroom?" The teacher may need to decide on future placement for the child. She may seek ways to bridge the gap between the school requirements and the child's interests. The teacher may not be able to see how she can support the child, and she may have requested the review in order to see the child in a new light. Sometimes a child seems to be "invisible" in the classroom, and the teacher needs to find out what the child is all about. Discrepancies in the child's work or behavior may puzzle the teacher.

Reviews do not always focus on problems. Special abilities or talents may draw a teacher to a particular child; conducting an exploratory review will help a teacher learn more about a child's experiences in the classroom. Descriptive Reviews uncover what a child values and what standards the child has for himself or herself.

Before the presentation, the teacher discusses her focusing question with a designated chairperson. In order to give a full portrayal of the child, she prepares the description using the following headings: *Physical Presence and Gesture*, *Disposition*, *Relationships with Children and Adults*, *Activities and Interests*, and *Formal Learning*. These headings and guiding questions provide a framework for learning what the child cares about and does well, and what the child's strengths are in all areas of the classroom. The teacher is asked to include both characteristic as well as unusual behavior. The headings are not discrete categories; they overlap and interrelate. Teachers feel that the procedure is flexible and agree that the specific questions under each heading help to make the child visible. The child emerges as a unique person who is trying to make sense of the world.

Building on the teacher's description of the child and on the chairperson's summary (which highlights dominant themes and patterns within the portrayal), the group's questions and comments may bring out new information from the presenter. The focusing question may even shift as a result of what emerges from the questioning. This interaction between the presenter and the listeners/participants helps the teacher overcome her own biases. Finally, using the new information, the group recommends ways to support the child's

strengths in the classroom. No one is trying to change the child. Rather, the Descriptive Review helps the teacher use the child's interests and values to create harmony in the child's school life.

What follows is an example of one Descriptive Review.

* * *

STEP I. Chairperson convenes the session. The teacher uses a pseudonym for the child, in order to protect his privacy.

Teacher: Sam is a first grader. He was 7 years old at the end of December. He has a sister who is 5 years old.

Chairperson describes the focusing question:

> How can Teacher R. support Sam's academic and social development so that he can become more independent and work along with others without constant supervision?

STEP II. The teacher presents the child according to the five headings listed earlier; the portrayal is usually uninterrupted. When the teacher's setting is unfamiliar to all the participants, the teacher begins the review by first showing the group her room plan and schedule.

1. PHYSICAL PRESENCE AND GESTURE

Guiding Questions

Characteristic gestures and expressions: How are these visible in the child's face, hands, body attitudes?
How do these expressions and gestures vary, and in response to what circumstances? (e.g., indoors and outdoors)
Characteristic level of energy: How would you describe the child's rhythm and pace? How does it vary?
How would you describe the child's voice: Its rhythm, expressiveness, inflection?

Implicit Assumptions

--A teacher learns about a child by observing the child.
--Describing is a way of knowing.
--Gesture can be described by using language that is grounded in specific detail.
--Each child is unique.
--Each child is complex.

--The context for behavior is important.
--Behavior may vary with the context.
--A teacher will take time to think about the child.

What Is Valued

--The whole child.
--The child's expressiveness.
--What the child shows us through her/his voice, body, gesture.
--The teacher's observations.
--The teacher's *sense* of the child.
--Taking time to pay attention to contexts and settings.
--The immediacy of daily social interactions.
--A range of behavior, including both typical and occasional.
--Particular language to convey shades of meaning.

Presentation

Sam, an attractive African-American boy, is slight, small, and usually has something in his mouth: his shirt, finger, or fist. Part of him is always wet. He is often tired and unkempt, but he brings healthy snacks to school. He moves around, with loose, open movements. I feel like he slips through my fingers. Often he appears confused, with a spaced-out look in his eyes. Never still, he is likely to wander around the room. He wants to touch everything. He keeps looking around as he works, except when he is drawing. Then his whole body is concentrated and focused on his bold images. He bears down hard with his crayons in regular and determined motions. He will initiate conversations but may not make eye contact when he talks to me. He often talks in a sing-song way, as if he's a baby. But there are flashes of poetic language: "Snow is God's spitballs." He gets very pleased with himself when he thinks he has said something "smart."

2. DISPOSITION

Guiding Questions

How would you describe the child's characteristic temperament and its range? (e.g., intense, even, lots of ups and downs)
How are feelings expressed? Fully? Rarely? How do you "read" the child's feelings? Where and how are they visible?
What is the child's emotional tone or "color"? (e.g., vivid, bright, serene, etc.)

Implicit Assumptions

--What we share as human beings makes us understandable to each other.
--Grounding observations in specific examples will evoke the child.

--A child will express a full range of feelings over time and in different settings.

What Is Valued

--Specific observation.
--Language that draws on imagery to create the child's feelings.
--A teacher's *sense* of a child.
--Shades of meaning.

Presentation

Sam is often late. Coming into the room seems to be hard for him. He has intense shifts in moods; he can enter the classroom boldly or very reluctantly. But lately his mornings are more cheerful. He seems especially lively at journal time. He talks a lot to other kids about what he is drawing. Through the day there are lots of ups and downs. He often seems sullen and irritable. I think he gets hungry. He can be sweet and expansive, but he also can be mean and snarl at other kids. He loses it a lot, punches others, and sneaks a kick when he is standing in line. He cries if he feels wronged, but he usually can't say much about how he feels. He is concentrated and calm when involved in painting, drawing, Lego. In the past, when I reprimanded him he wouldn't acknowledge he was wrong. Lately he can.

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Guiding Questions

Does the child have friends? How would you characterize these attachments? Are they consistent? Changeable?
Is the child recognized within the group? How is this recognition expressed? Is the child comfortable in the group?
How would you describe the child's casual, day-to-day contact with others? How does this daily contact vary?
When there are tensions, how do they get resolved?
How would you describe the child's relationship to you? To other adults?

Implicit Assumptions

--Friendships are important.
--There is a fluid community in the classroom.
--A child will be part of many kinds of interactions in the classroom.
--A child needs to feel safe and comfortable with the group.
--A teacher notices and is concerned about all aspects of the child.
--A child has continuity in her approach to the world of people and ideas.
--A child develops a definition of herself in relation to other children and adults.

What Is Valued

--Friendships.
--Relationships of all kinds.
--A child's capacity to connect with children and adults.
--The child's own feelings, preferences, choices, judgments.
--How a child sees herself or himself in relation to others.
--Other children's view of the child.
--A child's ability to resolve problems.
--The everyday, ordinary life experiences in a classroom.
--A teacher's own feelings about a child.
--A teacher's awareness of the group.

Presentation

At first this year Sam was very much alone and didn't talk much to other children. He played in areas with others but without relating to them. As the year went on, he began to relate to other kids around drawing and Lego and toys like Ninjas. He began to be more sociable as others talked about their writing and drawing. He loves Tarik, who is also an artist, and they draw special things for each other. He has been much happier since I changed his seat so he can be next to Tarik. But sometimes he will punch others, even Tarik, and be very mean. Some of the girls include him in their games in the schoolyard, letting him play at being Clifford, and they ride on his back. I have urged kids to try to help him control himself, and they seem to allow him more latitude in behavior. They are very accepting of him although he invades other kids' space, will go under their desks for some inviting toy, and then put it under his own desk. They get annoyed but don't complain as much about him as about other kids. They love his art work.

Although he takes up a lot of time, I find him appealing. I am drawn to his powerful drawings and paintings. I hug him, talk to him a lot, and praise his work. I sit with him and try to get him to focus on his work and control his behavior. Often I have sent him to paint at the easel to calm him down. He seems to appreciate my contact and affection and very recently has tried to hug me back. He has a good relationship with an aide who comes once a week. I have her read to him and take dictation at journal time. He always cheers up when he sees her.

4. ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS

Guiding Questions

What are the child's preferred activities?
Do these reflect underlying interests that are visible to you? For example, does drawing or story writing center on recurrent and related motifs such as superhuman figures,

danger and rescue, volcanoes, and other large scale events?
How would you describe the range of the child's interests?
Which interests are intense, passionate?
How would you characterize the child's engagement with projects? (e.g., quick, methodical, slapdash, thorough)
Is the product important to the child? What is the response to mishaps, frustrations?
Are there media that have a strong appeal for the child? (e.g., paint, blocks, books, woodworking)

Implicit Assumptions

--There is an observable pattern in a child's approach to the world.
--A child's choices indicate what is important to him or her.
--Certain motifs appeal to a child more strongly than others and will be reflected in her work.
--A child seeks meaning from experiences.
--A child can discover what he or she cares about in a rich classroom.
--A child can be understood from her approach to her work.
--Both process and product are observable and can be described.

What Is Valued

--A child's interests and choices.
--How a child is made visible in a classroom.
--A full range of activities and expressive media in the classroom.
--A child's capacity to make choices.
--The process of making, doing, creating.
--A child's capacity to become engaged in and care about her work.
--The child's work itself.
--A teacher's observations over time.

Presentation

Sam loves drawing, and he eagerly begins to draw in his journal. Other kids ask him to draw things for them all the time. In his pictures and stories he often will bring things together: the Ninjas meet Clifford; Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer meets Raphael. Each picture is a story. He starts with bold lines to open up space, then fills in figures with solid strong color, covering double pages in his book. Themes in his work are: heroes, monsters, dinosaurs, volcanoes, floods, action, fighting, powerful figures. He is proud of his artwork. [At this time, the teacher shows the group Sam's pictures and journals and passes them around.]

He is always engaged at project time. He loves sand, large blocks, and other construction materials. He is especially passionate about Ninjas, which he and other kids

bring in. He builds elaborate Lego constructions -- cars, houses, planes -- working intently and alone, staying focused on his project.

Everybody is seated either at their desks or on the rug at the times for journal writing, small group reading, and group discussions. Sam has trouble staying focused and finishing his work at those times. He breaks the classroom rule and sometimes wanders around, watches what other kids are doing, or begins projects that are not supposed to be done then.

He is very interested in all the science work we do. He wants to touch the caterpillars, play with the bugs and earthworms. He loves colored water and using kaleidoscopes. He gets deeply absorbed in stories, but has a hard time sitting with the group when we are reading together. He looks at books a lot, especially ones about things we have in the room.

5. FORMAL LEARNING

Guiding Questions

What is the child's characteristic approach to a new subject or process or direction?
In learning, what does the child rely on? (e.g., observation, memory, trial and error, steps and sequence, getting the whole picture, context)
How does that learning approach vary from subject to subject?
What is the child's characteristic attitude toward learning?
How would you characterize the child as a thinker?
What ideas and content have appeal? Is there a speculative streak? A problem-solving one? A gift for analogy and metaphor? For image? For reason and logic? For insight? For intuition? For the imaginative leap? For fantasy?
What are the child's preferred subjects?
What conventions and skills come easily? Which are hard?

Implicit Assumptions

--A teacher can observe and describe a child's learning approach.
--A child approaches new things in a special way.
--There are many ways to learn.
--A child's learning approach depends on subject matter and context.
--A child puts effort into learning.
--Every child is a thinker.
--Every child is trying to make sense.
--A child's engagement is expressed through language.
--Some things come easy; some are hard.
--A child has interests and preferences.

What Is Valued

--The child's particular learning approach and the strategies he or she relies on in different contexts.
--Ideas and subject matter.
--Many cognitive styles and diverse approaches to learning.
--Expressive language.
--A child's own choices and preferences.
--A child's strengths.
--A teacher's capacity to observe and describe.

Presentation

When Sam is drawing, he never seems to doubt his ability to create the image he wants. When we were making a big book about the Gingerbread Man, he could draw a picture that would capture the whole episode without any hesitation. He often looks very critically at his drawings. When he doesn't like one, he crumples it up or just goes on and starts a new one.

Sam gets frustrated in academic tasks and often says, "I can't do this," without trying. I find him very pathetic at these times. He seems to feel hopeless about his own resources for figuring out a word when he is writing or reading. He stops dead in his tracks, and it is only when I give him lots of support that he will try again. There is evidence in his journal that he has occasionally done it himself: written "bz" for "because" and "Lndo" for "Leonardo"; but even after he tells me the story he wants to write, and I help him with the invented spelling of some words, he can't sustain the effort himself. I usually have to move his finger to get him to track a line when he is supposed to be reading along with me.

Routines of all kinds are hard for him. Bringing back homework or library books, moving in the classroom to new activities, putting things away -- all these have been very hard. He has lost at least four homework books, partly because his after-school situation is so chaotic.

Formats seem to confuse him. In the math workbook, he needs a lot of help to figure out what is expected. He needs a lot of help using counters with math problems. Even after we have done a few examples, it is hard for him to keep doing each one the same way. It took him a long time to figure out and remember that there was a different way to do addition and subtraction problems. He is getting better at it now. He seems to love to do subtraction examples now. And, when he gets going, he wants to do lots and lots of them.

He is beginning to read, using predictable books, and the Bank Street Pre-Primers. He gets very excited about his successes. But he doesn't want to make mistakes. He is drawn to books about animals, especially dinosaurs, sharks, and bats, and will try to tackle easy books. He knows a lot of general information and gets excited about ideas. He uses

language inventively.

Chairperson: Summing up, how would you characterize the child's strengths? The child's vulnerabilities?

Presenting Teacher: Sam has wonderful artistic ability and a real spark -- interesting language and imaginative ways of seeing. He has trouble focusing and can get frustrated in academic work, and he can fall apart easily, both academically and socially. He gets confused and seems to feel lost and depressed a lot.

STEP III. Following the portrayal, the chairperson makes a short restatement of the portrayal, calling attention to dominant themes running through the picture presented.

Implicit Assumptions

--A pattern emerges across all the headings that helps us understand the child.
--People are understandable to each other.
--Hearing the dominant themes highlighted will help participants get an overall sense of the child and refocus on the child's strengths.
--Other perspectives balance the portrayal.

Chairperson's Summary

Sam's vulnerabilities overwhelm him, although it seems that he is happier now and is more responsive to the teacher and other children. Sam does have considerable strengths, which include his talent in art, but he seems to have trouble being in touch with them. He loses track of himself. He has lots of ups and downs.

Although he is appealing in many ways, some of his personal habits and ways of relating to other children are not acceptable in school. He drifts a lot, yet his drawings show focus and power and can evoke an entire scene. There are many paradoxes. Although the teacher says he slips through her fingers, she is drawn to him. He gets out of control with other children and invades their space a lot, but he has masterful control of line and color in his work. He loves stories and uses language in imaginative ways, but seems to be having trouble learning to read and write. Routines are hard for him, but he can concentrate for long periods of time.

STEP IV. The chairperson then asks for descriptions from other staff who have had the opportunity to work with the child or who have made observations specifically for the purpose of the Review. Presenting teachers can also report comments from other staff members who may not be present at the Review.

STEP V. The chairperson gives a brief account of the child's previous school experience, any important medical data, and any information supplied by the family for the use of the school. The privacy of the family is protected, and hearsay is avoided. The teacher tries to report what she knows directly from the family. The review is primarily focused on what the teacher can do in the classroom to support the child, unless the family chooses to be present or has become involved in the Review itself.

STEP VI. The chair opens the Review to the questions and comments of the participating staff after restating the focusing question.

Implicit Assumptions

--Multiple perspectives will ensure a balanced portrayal to neither overemphasize some current problem nor minimize an ongoing difficulty (Carini, 1986).
--Questions draw out new information and descriptions of the child.
--More information will clarify the portrayal of the child.
--It takes time to understand the child.
--Participants offer other perspectives because of their experiences with other children.
--The teacher may shift her question about the child.
--The teacher may not be aware of the changes and growth that are already occurring.
--Questions will be separate from recommendations.

As the participants listen to the portrayal, they are trying to actively construct a picture of the child. At this time, they take responsibility for the work of drawing out the presentation by asking questions. It is important to have enough time to ask questions so that the child will emerge as clearly as possible.

The participants' questions open up multiple perspectives through which the presenting teacher can make the child more visible for the group. The questions may suggest new ways of looking at the child. The presenting teacher's own biases may have prevented her from seeing a certain aspect of the child or her own behavior in relation to the child. Since the outcome of the Review is not predetermined, the questions and comments may lead the teacher to change her focusing question and her expectations.

As the listeners draw on their own experiences and knowledge of other children to try to make sense of this particular child and to make effective recommendations to the teacher, they are generating new information. These strategies and insights become a resource for everyone.

Participants' Questions

1. What exactly does Sam do when he falls apart?
2. What activities or experiences give him joy?
3. Is his little sister well-kempt?

4. You talked about relationships with other kids. Are there other times when children invite involvement with him?
5. Does he seek out other kids to help him with his work?
6. Do you lose your temper with him sometimes and what happens then?
7. Has he been checked out by a medical doctor?
8. What draws you to Sam?
9. How does he answer when you reprimand him?
10. What do you do when he wanders?
11. How do you see his mother relating to him?
12. What strategies does he use when he reads?

STEP VII. The chair then summarizes this new information, restates the focusing question, and asks for recommendations.

Implicit Assumptions

--Recommendations are based on the child's strengths.
--Recommendations address the focus that the teacher has stated.
--They may reflect new directions that arise from questions.
--They build on each other as one idea prompts another.
--They reflect the different perspectives of participants.
--They will take into account the realities of the classroom and school.
--They will support what the teacher can do in the classroom.
--Recommendations may be contradictory.
--The teacher is not expected to comment on them.
--The teacher will decide which ones are suitable for her.
--The recommendations are a resource for all the teachers.

Recommendations

1. Keep up the physical contact. This is helping him. He values contact and connection.
2. Focus on science. Especially, ask him to do observations of animals. He is interested in animals, sees the whole, and is also attentive to detail. Have him do observations of other activities in the classroom.
3. To help him focus his vision, have him do lots of activities with optics. Ask him to draw what he sees under the microscope or under magnifying lenses, then to compare how it looks without the lenses. Ask him to tell you what is real and what is not real.
4. Mirrors can help him to become more aware of his body. Have him make a self-portrait with and without a mirror.
5. When he constructs something, have him draw it in another medium.
6. Find books that reflect his interests and concerns, such as ***My Mother and I Are Growing Strong*** by Inez Maury (a children's book in English and Spanish). Discussions of human experiences reflected in literature

can be powerful ways to teach.

7. Find someone in the school who can be a . "anchor" for him for the next year. That person could talk to Sam, give him some extra attention, and keep track of his work and his ability to control himself with others.
8. You or the counselor could try to connect with a senior citizens group in the area that would be available to visit the school. The grandmothers and grandfathers have time and could read and talk with Sam, as well as the other kids in the school who need extra attention.
9. He creates wonderful drawings -- he has lots of potential. Have him make his own big books that could be shared. Have him make books about familiar stories and illustrate them.
10. Go through his journals with him to help him see that he's come a long way.
11. The Teachers Learning Cooperative should describe his pictures in one of its meetings.

STEP VIII. The chairperson's final "pulling together" of the review, critique, and plans for follow-up. In a brief summary, the chair draws out the dominant themes of the recommendations:

> The recommendations have to do with finding ways for Sam to see his strengths and himself more positively, to establish an outside focus to minimize his confusion, and to get him more attention. They acknowledge Sam's talents in art and suggest that the teacher use these to help him see his own strengths over time, and produce more writing. They suggest that the teacher build on his interests in science and animals to help him become more involved in academic work. These recommendations are consistent with the teacher's use of these subjects as the basis for developing curriculum in the classroom.

* * *

Teachers who have participated in many Descriptive Reviews feel that the format itself has certain general assumptions and values that have wide implications for teachers and for schools. Following are some of these, drawn from conversations in the Teachers Learning Cooperative.

Implicit Assumptions

--Teachers have knowledge about children and classrooms.
--Through descriptions of particular children, teachers can share this knowledge.
--Every person is active in seeking meaning in the world.
--Every person has strengths and the potential for growth and change.
--The teacher's question is important.
--The procedure provides a framework for an inquiry process, but what happens through the process is not predetermined.
--We use the same headings to describe many children, but each child emerges as a unique

person.
--Something new is being created through the unfolding of the process, as individual voices contribute their perspectives and experiences.
--Time is important in all aspects of the Review:

We are asked to look over time for what is characteristic, what is changeable, what is consistent from day to day.

Teachers need to take time to make observations.

All of us who participate are taking time to reflect on children and teaching.

--The process implies interpretation, which is mediated by the multiple perspectives of the participants. These multiple perspectives create balance.
--We assume the group will not attack the presenter or judge what she has or has not done. We trust the group.

What Is Valued

--We value the teacher's role as the observer in the classroom. The teacher makes sense out of day-to-day experiences.
--We value description and context. We describe a child's experiences in the classroom setting at the present time. We use specific detail grounded in every day classroom activities.
--We value plain and nonjudgmental language.
--We value active and attentive collaboration.
--We value the child's point of view: we ask what arouses a child's wonder and curiosity; what sustains his interest.
--We try to see the child's world.
--We value what a child and a teacher can already do, and build from the strengths we see.
--We value the teacher's judgment to choose recommendations that she thinks are useful.
--We value order, sequence, structure, and organization, as well as process and open-endedness.
--We value what we do. One of the participants takes notes, and we save the notes in three-ring notebooks.

* * *

Teachers often ask me the following question about using the Descriptive Review process: "I have 31 children in my classroom. How can I spend so much time on one child?" In response, I offer the thoughts of several teachers who have been regular participants in reviews.

> The Descriptive Review expands the vision of the presenter and the vision of all the participants as well. Looking closely at one child makes you understand many other children as well.

> When I hear about one child, I think about other children in my classroom.

The discussion about the one child often helps me see the others more clearly. Recommendations for the one child suggest things I can do to support the others in my room who resonate with this one...

Besides seeing one child more fully, it helps you reflect on your own classroom practices. It reaffirms your own practice, but it also deepens your awareness of the possibilities for supporting all children in the classroom.

The headings of the Review give me some distance when I'm worried or upset about a child. They give me a way to view the child without anxiety. That helps me understand other children, too.

The recommendations become a rich educational stew, representing a wide range of experiences and perspectives, which can be served up as needed in each person's classroom.

In the process of preparing for the Review, the teacher observes very closely. This close observation may itself change the way the teacher sees the child. She may see that the child has made great strides already. The teacher may be able to notice the child's strengths or special clues that she didn't notice before. The child may sense the attention and flourish because of it.

* * *

Implications of the Reflective Processes for Assessment, Evaluation, and School Restructuring

Every mode of assessment has a set of values and assumptions embedded in it. It is important to make those explicit for ourselves, so that we can make wise choices on the basis of this knowledge. What we learned about the Descriptive Review format made us realize that the assessment we use determines the way we see children and make educational decisions. We must choose assessment that is consistent with our values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Because the Descriptive Review is a collaborative process, it can contribute to the current efforts to restructure schools. The Descriptive Review process allows teachers to hear individual voices and to pursue collaborative inquiry. As teachers draw upon their experiences and knowledge, they begin to envision new roles for themselves and new structures for schools. They are also creating a body of knowledge about teaching and learning that starts with looking at a particular child in depth and ends with new insights and understandings about children and classrooms in general.

Teachers must have opportunities to participate in an educational community; to examine what they care about and what is important for children; to have ongoing, thoughtful conversations about teaching and learning in order to plan meaningful restructuring.

This explanation of the Descriptive Review inevitably brings us back to the original point in our inquiry: the standards people hold for themselves, and how these standards can be realized in schools. Because the Descriptive Review of a Child is a child-centered process, it shows us a child's internal standards rather than emphasizing external standards unrelated to the child's own interests and meanings.

> To have access to that understanding of a child or children, offers a guide to the education of the child's full potential. Recommendations can be made which draw upon and support the child's strengths, interests and power to make and do things ***(Prospect Center Documentary Processes***, 1986).

Through our understanding of the child's internal standards, we can shape an education in the classroom that recognizes and provides for what is important and meaningful to the child.

Appendix

Three reflective processes are mentioned in this monograph: the *Reflection*, the *Description of Work*, and the *Descriptive Review of a Child*. The Descriptive Review of a child is described at length in Rhoda Kanevsky's study. The reflection, as it is described in ***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes***, proceeds as follows:

> The purpose of the Reflection is to explore and disclose from the perspectives of a group of participants, the range of meanings, images, and experiences embodied in a word. Frequently, but not always, the word reflected upon and the reflection itself preface a description of a child's work, an observation, or a Descriptive Review of the Child. For example, a reflection on "writing" might introduce the description of several children's stories, or a reflection on "blocks" might be carried out prior to observing children engaging in block building activities.
>
> Whatever the focus of the reflection, participants in the process are asked to think about and write down their understanding of the word, not in an attempt to define it, but as a way of exploring the contexts in which it may appear, their own experiences with it, and the meanings it connotes, and other words, images, and ideas that it evokes. In effect, by attending to the word and concentrating on it, each person constructs, in varying degrees, and with greater or lesser detail, her own relationship and history to the meanings each word embodies.
>
> Following this period of individual thought and concentration, each person, in turn, reads what she has written down, taking time as needed to elaborate on the notes she has made, in order to clarify her thoughts. As each person places her ideas before the group, the other participants listen, and the person designated to chair the meeting makes note of the connections, complementarities, and divergences of meaning among the individual responses to that particular word. When all the responses have been heard, the chairperson restates them according to the range and pattern of meanings that have been articulated.
>
> The outcome of the process is a wider, deeper, and more richly textured understanding of the word reflected on, and the meanings it embodies. Perhaps of no less importance, a strong respect and appreciation is engendered for the contributions and viewpoints of other persons to these new understandings (***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes***, June 1986, pp. 1-2).

The Description of Work is described in ***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes*** as

follows:

> The Description of Work makes a product -- a drawing, a story, a construction, etc. -- the focus of concentrated attention, in a manner parallel to the focus on a word in the Reflection. The purpose of the Description is to explore and disclose, from the perspectives of a group of participants, as many dimensions of the work under discussion as possible. The process rests on the assumption that, when carefully described, the integrity or coherence of the work can be made visible and understandable. A further purpose of the Description is to come to some understandings of the perspective of the child who made the work. Here, it is assumed that, to a greater or lesser degree, the work will provide access to the child's characteristic modes of expression and ways of making sense of experiences...
>
> Importantly embedded in this process, therefore, is the notion that works -- all works -- bear the imprint of the maker, and the imprint left there is in no respect accidental. The continuity of a person, conceived as a self-coherent whole, enjoying an integrity of perspective, peculiarly his or her own, is mirrored here in the conceptualization of a work, which displays a wholeness and integrity continuous with that perspective. Thus, in practice, the attention given to the work has to be as respectful as the attention that would be accorded to the person who made it.
>
> Usually, but not always, the Descriptions of Work occur as a series in which the works by one child in at least two media (e.g., drawing and writing) are individually described. Obviously, a single piece of work, however closely observed and described, can offer only a partial and tenuous access to understandings of the person who made it. Nonetheless, descriptions of one work can be productively used as the entry point to the body of work, or as a supplement to the description of a child, achieved through observation and through related processes, such as the Descriptive Review of the Child. Also, description of a single piece of work does lead to deepened understanding and appreciation of *that* piece of work in its own right, and to greater awareness of the importance of children's artworks in general.
>
> To begin, a series in which several pieces of work are to be described, one or more reflections are held: these might be on the medium used (e.g., words, paint, wood), or on a motif, subject, or theme which is present in the child's *oeuvre* (e.g., flying, kite, motion).
>
> Following the Reflection, participants are customarily asked to offer impressionistic responses to the work selected for description, as a way of gaining a first acquaintance with the piece. If the work is in written form, it is first read aloud, sometimes by several persons, in order to hear it in several

voices. Often, but not always, the first impressions include feelings immediately aroused in the viewer by the work: for example, "It's so gay and bubbly, it makes me laugh," or, "For all the bright colors, for me, it creates an atmosphere of tension." As each person makes an initial response to the work, the chair of the session makes note, as in a Reflection, of the connections, complementarities, and divergences in the responses. When the initial responses are completed, the chairperson restates these patterns to the group.

Following this restatement, the group commences the first of several "rounds" of description addressed to the work. In the first "round," the chairperson asks the participants to attend to particular elements and noticeable details -- what might be called the "surface" of the piece. The further instruction given is that if the connection of the description to a particular feature of the work is not unmistakably self-evident, the person offering it should connect it to its perceived location. (For example, "There are three shades of green -- the trees are darkest, the grass is lightest, and, then, there is that sort of olive shade in the man's pants, and on what looks like a bird.")

After each participant has, in turn, offered a description, the chairperson restates the description according to the patterns that emerge from the individual responses. Depending on the size of the group, and the complexity or density of the work, it may take two or three "rounds" to accomplish this level of description. Since this phase of the Description is the foundation for less literal description at later phases of the process, it is important not to move on until common understandings of the piece have been arrived at by the group.

Among the aspects of the work that might be described in subsequent "rounds" are the following:

- Style — For example, "There is a high horizon line that creates the impression of distance," or "The opening sentence is direct -- it gets you right into the action."
- Tone — For example, "All those shades of brown create an almost somber mood," or "This is a story with a lot of sounds in it -- most of them sharp, staccato, or abrupt, like 'kaboom.'"
- Rhythm — For example, "There are a lot of circular sweeps of the brush -- big, broad waves of color," or "This isn't a poem in the technical sense, but the inflection stresses create a melodic effect."

(***The Prospect Center Documentary Processes***, June 1986, pp. 8-10.)

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